A2 Liebowitz, R.D.
1 2004 Inauguration

President Ronald D. Liebowitz Inauguration
Governor Jim Douglas Remarks
October 10, 2004

Ron, thank you so much for inviting me to be here this morning for this important and exciting celebration in our college's history. It holds a special meaning to me as an alumnus of this great institution. And I'm really delighted and honored to join your many friends in congratulating you as our 16th president.

It really matters who is president of Middlebury College. This is a very challenging ship to steer. It carries delicate cargo through dangerous waters. It doesn't always maneuver well because it contains all this power, this intellectual frothing, and all these scholars are moving around, shifting the balance of the tub. So, who runs it is very important to all of us. It's important to me. I live within just a couple of miles of the college, and in many ways I feel I've never left. I have a day job, of course, but I'll always feel a part of the Middlebury College community.

I think college presidents are interesting people. Here they are in the midst of a serious scholarly career, and they step forward to lead, usually forfeiting their most precious years, for something that doesn't get published, something that doesn't allow them to demonstrate a remarkable teaching style, or something that is one long, hard slog day after day. Imagine an average day: The alumni association is angry about the change in the athletic schedule. The biggest donor is suddenly in town and wants to meet. The faculty is unhappy with the new curriculum. The New York Times is calling, asking for your position on the latest Supreme Court decision on affirmative action. It takes a special set of talents to fulfill this august office, with everybody watching you, everybody listening when you talk, everybody counting on you to solve every problem every day. It takes a special kind of courage to want this job.
The state of Vermont charters all corporations. And so it was with Middlebury College, ten score and four years ago. Vermont was a very different place in those days. A state of farms, mills and small villages. There were no ski areas, no highways, not even a state capital. The legislature traveled around from year to year, alternating between the east and west sides of the Green Mountains. Imagine a government so small and uncomplicated that it could pick up and move every year.

In 1800, the unicameral assembly came to Middlebury, and met in the courthouse--not the one that now serves as the college's center for technology, but one no longer there, further down the street--and approved the charter for Middlebury College. The college's success was by no means assured. More than a few institutions endeavored to survive in early Vermont, and failed. But Middlebury College did far more than merely survive. See what we have here today: a rich legacy, a vital faculty, a commitment to scholarship and teaching, a new science center, a new library, a new president.

Middlebury College is more than an institution in our town, because its influence extends far beyond the borders of Middlebury. It's an integral part of our state. It attracts the finest teachers and scholars. It enriches the community educationally, culturally, and socially. Talented alumni choose to live in Vermont and contribute in so many ways. It's the largest employer in the county, contributing greatly to the economy of the region and our state. Its reputation extends literally around the glove.

So on behalf of state Government, which gave the college its official birth, I congratulate Middlebury College on this latest milestone in its long and rich history. President Liebowitz, I welcome you to a new station in your life, a new challenge, and a long and productive presidency. Congratulations.